

Proposal for a Study of Alternative Programmes to Improve the Nutrition of Native Northern Residents

Indian and Northern Affairs

For some time, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has been aware of controversy surrounding the issue of food consumption in the North. The issue has been raised on a number of fronts by different groups, often with different objectives. Medical personnel from the Department of National Health and Welfare have become alarmed over the growing evidence of improper nutrition of native people in the Northwest Territories. Concern has been expressed by this Department through studies by Nutrition Canada in 1975, and independently by a number of experts in the Medical Services Branch of N.H.&W. By and large, Health & Welfare has restricted PROPOSAL FOR A STUDY OF ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMMES TO itself to identifying the problem rather than recommending solutions.

IMPROVE THE NUTRITION OF NATIVE NORTHERN RESIDENTS

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Proposal for a Study of Alternative Programmes to Improve the Nutrition of Native Northern Residents

Introduction

For some time, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has been aware of controversy surrounding the issue of food consumption in the North. The issue has been raised on a number of fronts by different groups, often with different objectives. Medical personnel from the Department of National Health and Welfare have become alarmed over the growing evidence of improper nutrition of native people in the Northwest Territories. Concern has been expressed by this Department through studies by Nutrition Canada in 1975, and independently by a number of experts in the Medical Services Branch of N.H.&W. By and large, Health & Welfare has restricted itself to identifying the problem rather than recommending solutions.

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transportation was not an overwhelmingly important factor in explaining price differentials between northern and southern Canada. The studies were very limited in scope, in that no reference was made to factors other than transportation, and retail prices rather than nutrition were used as the criteria for measurement.

The Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs sponsored a consumer workshop in Pangnirtung in March 1977, at which the question of food subsidies was brought up. Among the resolutions adopted by the Workshop were several recommending subsidies on "needed foods", "frozen meat . . . especially where native foods are in short supply", and "frozen orange juice or even all frozen foods". In addition, the Workshop recommended that "Communities that do not have enough native foods should be enabled to obtain them from communities with a surplus".

A number of community organizations have either expressed concern over the general problem or have requested specific action by the Federal Government. The Baffin Regional Council has placed the issue of food prices on the agenda of each of its meetings. Several communities, notably Grise Fiord, have requested a subsidy on the transportation of certain food commodities imported from the South.

Inuit native organizations have expressed concern over the problem in a number of ways. The Baffin Region Inuit Association participated in the Pangnirtung workshop already mentioned. In addition BRIA has expressed concern over the potential impact of resource development on the consumption of country food by Inuit in the Baffin area. The Inuit Cultural Institute has asked for financial support for a study whose objectives would include the determination of the nutritional characteristics of country food. The Inuit Tapirisat of Canada has asked the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to support a "meat exchange" programme for country food particularly in the Baffin Region.

It should be clear from the above that there are pressures on the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs from many sources to take some initiative but available evidence is not conclusive as to the preferable course of action. It is our view that, while a great deal of useful study has been done of specific aspects of the northern food problem, much of the work has lacked a unifying focus and there has been little co-ordination between groups and organizations. It is for these reasons that this Department is proposing to initiate a comprehensive study in full cooperation with other interested groups. The study would essentially be an evaluation of alternative causes of action or programmes for government to implement, with the criterion for evaluation of alternatives being cost-effectiveness in terms of nutrition of native people. Nutrition would be used as the criterion, as it is the essential link between country food and southern food for native people. The overall study would in fact be an umbrella for the studies of specific alternatives.

Objectives of the Overall Study

- 1) To identify specific nutrition problems in northern communities.
- 2) To identify and evaluate alternatives to improve nutrition in communities where problems exist.
- 3) To select the most cost-effective alternative and recommend the best means of implementation.

Study Structure

The study will be carried out in four phases, although one of these phases will occupy the bulk of the time involved in the overall study. The phases are briefly outlined below.

Phase One - Identify the nutrition problems, if any, in the native population of northern communities. Include as many communities as possible in the initial review. Conclude by providing a list of communities, a description of the type and seriousness of nutrition problems, and a commentary upon the types of food commodities (country food and southern food) whose consumption would alleviate the problems.

Phase Two - Identify potential feasible alternatives for government initiative in the food/nutrition area. Obviously, there are almost limitless alternative courses of action, but selection should be limited to broadly representative alternatives. Many alternatives have already been suggested by one or more groups. A summary of alternatives already suggested follows:

Possible Alternatives to Examine

For Country Food

1. Provide organizational support and possibly capital assistance to help set up a transportation and distribution system from "have" communities to "have not" communities. Meat would be sold on a regular commercial basis.
2. Set up a transportation and distribution system for sea mammal meat, and subsidize prices, either by paying the hunter or by using a type of food stamp program for consumers.
3. Subsidize hunting activities within communities to permit more hunters to remain active. Distribution of meat would be traditional (i.e. non-commercial).
4. A combination of (2) and (3).

For Southern Food

1. Give predetermined amount of selected foods away through the Nursing Station or Settlement Manager.
2. Establish a food stamp or coupon program for consumers.
3. Subsidize the cost of transportation of selected foods.
4. Establish storage facilities for selected perishable commodities at intermediate and/or final destinations.
5. Educate consumers on good nutrition.
6. A combination of any or all of the above.

Phase Three - Evaluate each alternative. To do this, the alternative would be hypothesized, costs to government or other organizations estimated, and effectiveness in terms of improved nutrition estimated. In many, if not most cases, the evaluation of alternatives will necessarily include the use of pilot projects at selected communities.

Phase Four - Comparison of the evaluation of alternatives, selection of the preferred alternative, and preliminary design of a programme to implement the preferred alternative.

Participation in the Study

It is vital to the success of the study that a meaningful commitment be made by a wide range of departments and organizations. D.I.A.N.D. has neither the resources nor the expertise to undertake the entire study. The following represents a minimum

list of federal departments, and other organizations whose contribution is considered essential.

Phase One - Dept. of National Health and Welfare
 Government of the Northwest Territories
 Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development
 Inuit Tapirisat of Canada

Phase Two - Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development
 Govt. of the Northwest Territories
 Inuit Tapirisat of Canada

Phase Three - Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development
 Government of the Northwest Territories
 Inuit Tapirisat of Canada
 Dept. of Fisheries and Environment
 Dept. of National Health and Welfare
 Dept. of Transport
 Dept. of Consumer and Corporate Affairs

Phase Four - Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development
 Government of Northwest Territories
 Inuit Tapirisat of Canada

The above list should not be regarded as exhaustive. Particularly in Phase Three, it may be necessary to involve other groups in the evaluation of specific alternatives. It should be noted that not all organizations named in Phase Three would be involved in the evaluation of all alternatives; the list is general rather than being split into individual alternatives.

One will observe that D.I.A.N.D., the G.N.W.T., and I.T.C. would have key roles to play in each phase. These organizations would in effect form the Steering Group for the overall study, with the other departments and organizations being called upon as needed for input to specific study segments.

Development of a Detailed Workplan

This paper describes only the conceptual framework for the overall study. Detailed work plans would have to be developed for the nutrition review in Phase One, and for the evaluation of each alternative in Phase Three. Phases Two and Four would not require detailed work plans, as these phases represent essentially decision points in the study, and would not be time consuming. Detailed work plans for specific phases would be developed by departments or organizations participating in that phase.

These work plans would include a detailed description of work to be done, and a description of human, financial, and material resources required for the completion of the study segment.

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